



The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry  
United States Senate  
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry  
United States Senate  
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

September 2, 2021

Dear Chair Stabenow and Senator Boozman:

We are writing to request your support for Puerto Rico's inclusion in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The nearly 90 business, community and advocacy groups signed on to this letter are advocating for the provisions in the Closing the Meal Gap Act (HR.4077/S.2192) that would allow for an orderly transition of the territories into the SNAP program be included in the current budget resolution. These provisions address nutrition disparities faced by American families and children residing in Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands by ensuring that in the face of economic slowdowns, public health crises, natural disasters and rising food insecurity, our fellow U.S. citizens living in the territories have equal access to nutrition aid currently available to the most low-income and food insecure Americans.

Since 1982, U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa have been excluded from SNAP and from receiving the same nutrition assistance provided to other low-income Americans, exacerbating food insecurity particularly during times of great need. Forty years ago, the United States legislated Puerto Rico's participation in the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) through a capped block grant that does not fluctuate or respond to need. From its inception, the block grant was funded at 75 percent of the expected cost of the Food Stamp Program in Puerto Rico, resulting in a harmful 25 percent reduction. To comply with the new conditions, Puerto Rico tightened eligibility requirements and reduced maximum benefits to U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico.

The recent change to the USDA Thrifty Food Plan increases the Puerto Rico nutrition grant, however, it does not create parity with the states, or with other territories like Guam or the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NAP block grant is not need based and under the new TFP guidelines, Puerto Rico benefits will continue to be 25-30 percent lower than SNAP benefits provided in the fifty states. *Tragically, as a block grant and unlike SNAP, Puerto Rico NAP does not automatically increase in times of great need, forcing territorial residents to wait in hunger when emergencies strike.*

Puerto Rico already has demonstrated its ability to transition into SNAP by fully implementing an EBT system, updating technology capabilities, phasing out cash benefits, and training employees. In recent reports, USDA and FNS have positively evaluated Puerto Rico's compliance with FNS regulations, planning requirements, and program monitoring.

Finally, funding provided to Puerto Rico directly impacts U.S. farmers and food producers throughout the 50 states. In 2019, Puerto Rico imported \$6.5B in food and beverage products from the U.S. The island ranks as the second or third-largest importer of U.S. staple agricultural products in the Western Hemisphere, after Mexico and Canada, surpassing countries with larger populations than Puerto Rico. Expanding SNAP to Puerto Rico creates jobs and builds economies throughout the U.S.

The Closing the Meal Gap Act would fix Puerto Rico's unequal treatment under Federal law, help the nation's most vulnerable citizens during times of extreme need, and grow agricultural economies throughout the 50 states. The proposal has the significant support with 91 House and four Senate cosponsors. We are asking you to support the provisions in the Closing the Meal Gap Act that transition Puerto Rico into SNAP by including them in the current budget resolution. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact Lillian Rodriguez Lopez, Director of the Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico at [lillianrodriguezlopez@gmail.com](mailto:lillianrodriguezlopez@gmail.com) or Laura Esquivel, Vice President of Federal Affairs for the Hispanic Federation at [lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org](mailto:lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org) who will be able to provide additional information and will be contacting your office directly on this matter.

Thank you for your support.

Respectfully submitted by,

Coalition for Food Security and Hispanic Federation

### **Business Members**

ACDET - Puerto Rico Retailers Association

AgroNegocios

B. Fernandez & Hnos, Inc.

Ballester Hermanos, Inc.

Caribbean Can Manufacturing

Century Packing Corp./Carmela Foods

Coca-Cola Puerto Rico Bottlers

Crowley Maritime Corp.

Supermercados Econo, Inc.

Kikuet Foods

Mendez & Co., Inc.

MIDA - Food Merchandising and Distribution Association

Navis

PET Plastics, LLC

Plaza Provision Company

Puerto Rico Coffee Roasters

Puerto Rico Rice, LLC

Puerto Rico Supplies Group

Quirch Foods

SuperMax Puerto Rico  
Tote Maritime  
V. Suarez & Co.  
Walmart Puerto Rico

### **National Advocacy Organizations**

Alianza de Lideres Comunitarios de PR  
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)  
AMERICAN GI FORUM OF THE U.S.  
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Endeavors  
Equally American Legal Defense and Education Fund  
Esperanza United (formerly Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network)  
Feeding America  
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)  
GreenLatinos  
Hispanics in Philanthropy  
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
MALDEF  
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE)  
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators  
National Hispanic Media Coalition  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Latinx Psychological Association  
National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA)  
National Puerto Rican Day Parade  
National WIC Association  
PFLAG National  
Power4 Puerto Rico Coalition  
PR University Center on Developmental Disabilities (PR-UCEDD)  
RESULTS  
SER - Jobs for Progress National Inc.  
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP)  
The National Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce  
Unidos US  
ZERO TO THREE

## **State & Local Organizations**

Accion Valerosa, Inc.

Alianza Center

Banco de Alimentos Puerto Rico, Inc.

Centro de Microempresas y Tecnologías Agrícolas Sustentables Yauco Inc. (CMTAS)

Centros Sor Isolina Ferré, Inc.

Coalición de Coaliciones Pro Personas sin Hogar de PR, Inc.

Coalición de Residentes de Vivienda Publica del Área Metropolitana

Connecting Paths PR, Inc

Consejo de Residentes Residencial Luis Llorens Torres Sector Youth Center

Conservación ConCiencia

Departamento de la Comida de Puerto Rico

El Mundo de los Muñecos: Puppet World Inc.

Fundacion Infantil Ronald McDonald of Puerto Rico, Inc. - San Juan, PR

Fundación Música y País

Instituto Nueva Escuela

Movimiento para el Alcance de Vida Independiente

Mujeres de Islas

Mumas Renaciendo Corp.

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico

One Stop Career Center of PR Inc

OPDH

P.E.C.E.S., Inc.

Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services Inc

Puerto Rico Para Tod@s

Red por los Derechos de la niñez y Juventud de Puerto Rico

Salud Integral en la Montaña, Inc.

Sol es VIDA Inc.

Waves Ahead Corp

Y No Había Luz, Inc.